

JOSEPH of Arimathea.

Wherein is contained,

The true Account of his Birth, his Parents, his County, his Education, his Piety; and how he begged of PONTIUS PILATE the Body of Our Blessed Saviour, after his Crucifixion, which he buried in a new Sepulchre of his own.

Also the Occasion of his Coming to ENGLAND,

Where he first preached the Gospel at Glastenbury in Somersetshire; and where is still growing that noted White-Thorn, which buds every Christmas-Day in the Morning, Blossoms at Noon, and fades at Night, on the Place where he pitched his Staff in the Ground.

With a full Relation of his Death and Burial.



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JOSEPH of Arimathea

THE person we are going to speak of, named Joseph, was a just, holy, pious, and devout man, born at Arimathea, otherwise called Rameth, and afterwards Ramula. It was a city formerly allotted for the Levites, and situated near Sophim on mount Ephraim, near the confines of the tribes of Benjamin and Dan; and is also noted for being the birth place of Samuel the prophet, who here lived and died, and was buried.

Here Joseph was born, and from hence was called Joseph of Arimathea; he was the son of one Matthias, who was considerable for his extraction, but more for his justice and authority in Jerusalem, which was the metropolis of that country; his bringing up, during his tender years, was with one Jonathan, who was his brother by the same father and mother, with whom he profited in all kind of sciences, having a good memory, and quick apprehension; so that being yet a child of fifteen years of age, he was praised by all men, in regard of the good affection he had to learning, and the priests and noblest citizens vouchsafed to ask his opinion of things that concerned their laws and ordinances.

He was born about eight years before the nativity of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

and about the age of seventeen years, his desire being to search and have an insight, into the laws and customs of the three sects of the Jewish nation, the Pharisees, which is the chiefest, the second the Saducees, and the third the Essenes; to the end he might chuse the better of the three, when he understood them all. He declined the two latter, and adhered to the former, addicting himself to such great austerities and labours, that hearing of one Malachi an holy man, who lived in a desert, cloathed himself with nothing but what the trees brought forth, fed on no other kind of meat but what they freely yielded, and washed himself oftentimes by day and night in cold water; to keep himself chaste, he went and lived with him, and imitated his course of life, for the space of four years, at which time he returned to Jerusalem again, at the age of one and twenty years.

But now, though Joseph of Arimathea had intirely devoted himself to the sect of the Pharisees, yet was he not addicted to the vices which too evidently appeared among them, especially hypocrisy; for he was really just in all his dealings, pious without ostentation, and very charitable in private: infomuch that he obtained the praise of the rich, and the benediction of the poor, wherever he went, and gloried more to be a good man than a great senator, to which dignity his incomparable merits had justly preferred him.

However, when Jesus Christ began to take upon him the great work of the ministry of the Go

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pel, and by his holy life, pure doctrine, and supernatural miracles, had procured many Jews to embrace what he taught them; among the rest of his followers this Joseph of Arimathea became a great admirer of our Saviour's preaching, insomuch that declining the Levitical laws, as then taught in the Jewish church, he became a sincere convert, and followed Christ in all the journeys which he took throughout the land of Judea and Galilee, for the promulgation of the Gospel.

But when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, who sold the precious blood of our lord and master, for the value of thirty pence, after the condemnation was passed upon him by Pontius Pilate, the Roman president of Syria, and he was crucified on the cross, for the sins of the whole world. — As soon as he was dead, this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich man, went, as the evangelist St. Matthew tells us, chap. xvii, 58, 60, to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered; and when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed.

Now, as for the manner of the sepulchre wherein our Saviour was laid, take the description thereof, as given by Adricomius, in his relation of the Holy Land, and which is as follows: The glorious sepulchre of our Lord, says he, was a new monument, situated about one hundred and eight feet from mount Calvary, and distant one thousand

paces from mount Sion. Here it was that Joseph of Arimathea, a noble senator, cut out of a rock that was in his garden, a place of interment, in which he, together with Nicodemus, the blessed Mary, and other women, buried from the cross, by consent of Pilate, the body of Jesus, which they had wrapped up in fine linen, perfumed with myrrh and aloes; his head was placed towards the West, from whence it has been the custom ever since, among the Christians, to bury the dead, in many of their church-yards, with the feet towards the East; and those attending his sacred funeral, having rolled a great stone to the door of the monument, they returned to their several habitations.

In the mean time, the priests, scribes, and pharisees, endeavouring to hinder the resurrection of Christ, they set a guard of soldiers to watch the sepulchre, the mouth whereof they closely shut up, and set their seals on the door, that they might not be deceived thro' any frauds, either of his disciples or their own keepers; but this diligence of the Jews, who would have obstructed his rising, did rather increase the miracle, and confirm the faith of our Saviour's resurrection; for, on the third day after his crucifixion, receiving life again, he came to Mary Magdalen, first in the likeness of a gardiner; according to these words of the evangelist, Jesus saith unto her, woman, why weepest thou? she, supposing him to be the gardiner, saith unto him, If thou hast borne him hence, tell me here thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. John xx. 15.

After the death of our Saviour, Joseph of Arimathea led a solitary life, about six months, in commemoration of our Saviour's crucifixion for his salvation, as well as the whole race of mankind; but this time of penitence being compleated, he came again among the apostles, and by St Peter was adopted one of the seventy-two disciples.—So to make good that great charge which he had took upon him, understanding from Felix, who then governed Jerusalem, that certain noble Christians, men of much honour, and more virtue, were, for preaching the Christian faith, sent to Rome by his commandment, to answer what was objected against them in Cæsar's presence; being desirous of the service, and having special intelligence, that the torments wherewith they were martyred, lessened not their piety, but that they lived contentedly on figs and nuts. He, for this cause, departed presently for Rome, and was encountered with many and grievous hazards by sea; for the ship wherein he sailed was wreck'd in the midst of the Adriatick sea, and about six hundred of them were forced to swim all night long, and at day-break, by God's providence, a Cyrenian ship came in sight, and he, and about fourscore others, who outswam the rest, were taken up, and saved.

After he had in this sort escaped, he went to Diarchia, which the Italians call at this day Puteoli, and grew acquainted with Baliturnus, a Jew born, who was a comedian, and in good reputation with Tiberius; by whose means, insinuating

himself into the empress Poppæa's knowledge, he determined to beseech her to procure the liberty of those Christians in bondage; and being gratified likewise by her with many gifts, he returned again into his own country.

Being now returned home, and having given a full account to the twelve apostles, of what special service he had done for the vindication of the Christian liberty at Rome, he was appointed and ordained to go and preach the Gospel in England; and, according as the mission commanded him, he took shipping at Joppa, and sailing with a great deal of difficulty, and meeting many dangerous storms, through the Mediterranean sea, he at length landed at Barrow-bay in Somersetshire, and then proceeding onwards of his journey eleven miles that day, came to Glastenbury in the same county; where, fixing his pilgrim's staff in the ground, it was no sooner set in the earth, but just like Aaron's rod (which blossomed flowers when there was a contest betwixt him and other learned Jews for the priesthood) it was presently turned into a blossoming thorn, which supernatural miracle made the numerous spectators, who came to see this wonder, be very attentive to hear his preaching the Gospel, which was concerning Christ crucified for the redemption of mankind.

He arrived at Glastenbury about three years after the death of our blessed Redeemer, being then in the forty-fourth year of his age, doing there such wonderful miracles, that he presently brought to the conversion of Christ above one thousand souls. Besides, as Eusebius, Sozomenes, and Rufinus, three most faithful ecclesiastical writers, relate, he baptized at the city of Wells, which is within four miles of Glastenbury, eighteen thousand persons one day; to devout, zealous, and holy, was the life of Joseph of Arimathea, that although he found the inhabitants of this island very barbarous and superstitious, yet, by wholesome admonitions, in learnedly as well as strenuously exhorting them to change their erroneous opinions, representing before their eyes, the heinousness of their damnable folly and blindness, he piously persuaded them not to hazard the salvation of their souls, and their posterity, by embracing downright idolatry, in worshipping the sun, moon, and stars, as well as living creatures, both on the earth, as well as in the sea.

Thus Joseph of Arimathea, by his godly life and good behaviour, having obtained the good-will of one Ethelbertus, a king then reigning in the western parts of England, and many other

nobles, whom he converted to the Christian faith, he founded a most famous abbey at Glastonbury; which was the first Christian church in the world, and by the large endowments settled upon it afterwards by the Christian princes, it became one of the richest monasteries in Christendom.

In the ancient town of Glastonbury the holy Joseph of Arimathea continued till the day of his death, being forty-two years, so that he was eighty-six at his death: and so venerable was his person then held, that six kings of those parts honoured his corpse by carrying him on royal shoulders to the grave; which was made in the chancel of Glastonbury-abbey, and had a most stately tomb erected over him, with the following inscription: **HERE LIES THE BODY OF THAT MOST NOBLE DISCIPLE, RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE BY THE NAME OF JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA, AND NOTED BY THE FOUR EVANGELISTS, ST. MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, AND JOHN, FOR HIS BEGGING THE BODY OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR, WHEN CRUCIFIED TO REDEEM LOST MEN FROM ETERNAL DESTRUCTION, AND BURYING IT IN A TOMB OF HIS OWN MAKING. HE DIED A. D. 45, AGED 86.**

The church-yard of Glastonbury, formerly called Ayotonia, is also noted for the burial-place of king Arthur, whose sepulchre was searched for by King Henry II. and found under a stone, with an inscription on it, declaring whose ashes it covered.

And in veneration for Joseph of Arimathea, a lady living at Glastonbury, a little after the death of this holy man, obtained of her husband as much pasture-ground for the good of the inhabitants, as he was able to walk about barefoot in a whole day.

But what is more remarkable is the White-Thorn, otherwise called the Holy-Thorn, which to this very time is noted thro' all Europe, for its budding on Christmas-day in the morning, blossoms at noon, and fades at night; and the reason is as above said; for that it was the staff of Joseph of Arimathea, which he fixing in the ground, it instantly took root where this famous thorn grows, and thereby proclaimed that spot a resting place for its master. And though the time of superstitious popery is in this kingdom abolished, yet do thousands of people, of different opinions, go annually to see this curiosity, which appearing supernatural, and contrary to the course of nature, makes us cry out with the Psalmist, *O Lord, how marvellous are thy ways!*

101. N. 7. 8.

This year has been to the western parts of England and Wales